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An Early-Day Christmas in Hawaii

BY JAMES T. STACKER.

If Father Damon, paternal ancestor of Rev. Frank Damon and his brother, Samuel M., could come back to Honolulu and read this issue of The Advertiser, particularly that portion which refers to the doings on Fort street last night, he would certainly marvel at the change that has come over the people—even his people—who were here working in the vineyard a half-century ago.

Christmas had little attention from the early missionaries in Honolulu. They were of the old Puritan stock and church holidays were, to them, more a sacrilege than anything else. New Year was made more of in Massachusetts for two and a half centuries after the arrival of the "Mayflower," than was Christmas and the same sentiment which dominated the early settlers of that section of the then new world prevailed among their descendants in the South Seas.

Going back through the columns of The Friend, edited by the Rev. Samuel C. Damon, "The Seaman's Chaplain," the first reference to the day is found in the issue of January 1, 1843, written by the editor, and is reproduced here in full:

Missionary Picnic.

As a holiday, Christmas is not forgotten by the young and old among the foreign residents of Honolulu. The late anniversary was characterized by the usual visiting, present-giving and wishing a merry Christmas. As a somewhat unusual occurrence our missionary friends observed the day in the way of a missionary picnic. We should say it partook, rather, of a good old fashioned New England Thanksgiving than of a church festival. The families residing at Punahou invited their missionary associates to pass the day at that, the most delightful spot in the environs of Honolulu. On our way thither the missionary flag was seen waving to the breeze. Some of our readers may now learn for the first time that a white ensign is the missionary banner. Not less than three score and ten children and youth were present, together with a score of older people. Within doors, the day was spent in free and social intercourse while without the merry sports of the young imparted animation to the scene. The day was surprisingly lovely. Health, and a moderate share of the good things of this life, together with the consciousness of not doing wrong by a temporary relaxation from the sterner and rather monotonous duty of missionary life, tended to impart cheerfulness to the occasion. How shall we speak of the tastefully arranged tables? If not sumptuously they were generously spread. Every dish was served up in the best style of good, American, housewife cookery. We doubt if the most fastidious admirer of French cookery would have declined a seat at table. Although the respective families represented, contributed "A share," yet the Punahou families are especially meritorious.

The day was concluded with religious services, when the hymns and addresses distinctly recognized the anniversary of our Savior's birth. Such scenes are both pleasant in the enjoyment and the retrospect. They call forth the social and better feelings of our nature. When properly conducted their influence is most salutary and happy.

Changed Slowly.

That celebration, sixty-two years ago, was, probably, as close to the Puritan's idea of the way the day should be observed as it has ever been demonstrated here. Just how gradual the change came about is not found in the volume of The Friend which Rev. Frank Damon kindly loaned me. It is not to be suspected that there was a spontaneous outburst of gaiety. Nay, nay. In those good old days, when the Scotch covenant considered it an evil to sail a boat on the Sabbath, the missionary colony in Honolulu followed so closely in its religious beliefs and doctrines those laid down by their New England forebears that a sudden breaking away would not have been tolerated.

Christmas in Mission House.

Frank Cooke, who lived at the old homestead on King street, tells me that his memory carries him back fifty years—a round half century—to the Christmas days in that, the first frame house ever erected in the Islands. In those days there were no Christmas trees, and Thanksgiving was the day most observed as a holiday among the white residents.

He said the other day:

No Christmas Trees.

"I do not remember seeing a Christmas tree in my very young days, but I remember Christmas very well. We children looked upon the day as the one in all the year when we were to receive presents, and I plainly remember hunting for my mother's black stockings to hang below the mantle. We borrowed hers because their capacity was greater than those we wore, and such things as were obtainable in those days were put into our stockings. 'The night before Christmas,' and we put gifts into the stockings of our parents. I can not remember the first general observance

of the day when a tree was put up. Indeed, I can not remember that we ever had one in our house during the age when I would have enjoyed it as a youngster. We used to have the missionary families in that house, but the building is associated with that day only in connection with a semi-Thanksgiving Day observance, and it would have been rather out of form to have made too much of it, because

learning, Oahu College, with a national reputation.

In her early life the roof of the first frame house on the islands covered her. I am not sure, but it is my impression, that Mrs. Coan was born in that house, but as she went away when little more than a babe she was not called upon to suffer the privations experienced by some of the others. I have heard someone say, I can not re-

homestead on Alexander Street and a beautiful spot it is; void of all traces of modern architecture but bringing to memory recollection of the homes of prosperous farmers of New England. I find no difficulty in closing my eyes to facts and imagining one of those white painted houses with its green blinds being lifted on air and set down in one of the prettiest spots in the Punahou district. I found this remain-

and my first recollection of Christmas was in that state when, as a girl of ten, the friends with whom I was stopping got up a Christmas tree in my honor. Not in my honor, first, but in honor of our Saviour for whom we call the day. It was all new to me and the enjoyment was more than I can describe. I remained away from the Islands until forty years ago and in that time they had become modernized. Up to the time I went away we had no thought of a Christmas tree at the homestead on King Street and I do not believe its associations are with those of Christmas celebrations other than such as might be made by the families who made that house their home."

Christmas and Poverty.

And to get back to the object of this article: Comparison with the celebrations that have been held in the churches here during the past twenty years. There is, practically, nothing to compare them with if one is limited to the days between forty-five and sixty. It is a new world. There were no particularly poor children in Honolulu in these days, in fact there were no poor children here twenty years ago. They are of recent growth and I am sometimes inclined to believe they are poor only by comparison. For years the Islands have been growing richer per capita and it is passing strange that with the increase in the wealth of individuals there should be an increase in the poverty of children.

For several years Palama and Kakaako Missions have done much to make Christmas brighter and more joyous for these poor children. Following those capital places which are in charge of Mr. Rath and Mr. Rider, came a similar institution, Kalihii Mission, which is doing much real good. In any of the places Christmas without a tree would be a cold and dreary day even here in Paradise. Then the Salvation Army has done considerable through the help afforded by the citizens.

The youngest baby in the bunch is the Malihini Christmas Tree, born a year ago and three times as strong to day as it was then. There will be twelve hundred children made happy today around that tree. Compare that

number with the "Three score and ten" who went to Punahou on Christmas day 1847 for the purpose of celebrating what appeared to the chronicler of the time to be something resembling a New England Thanksgiving picnic. Times have changed.

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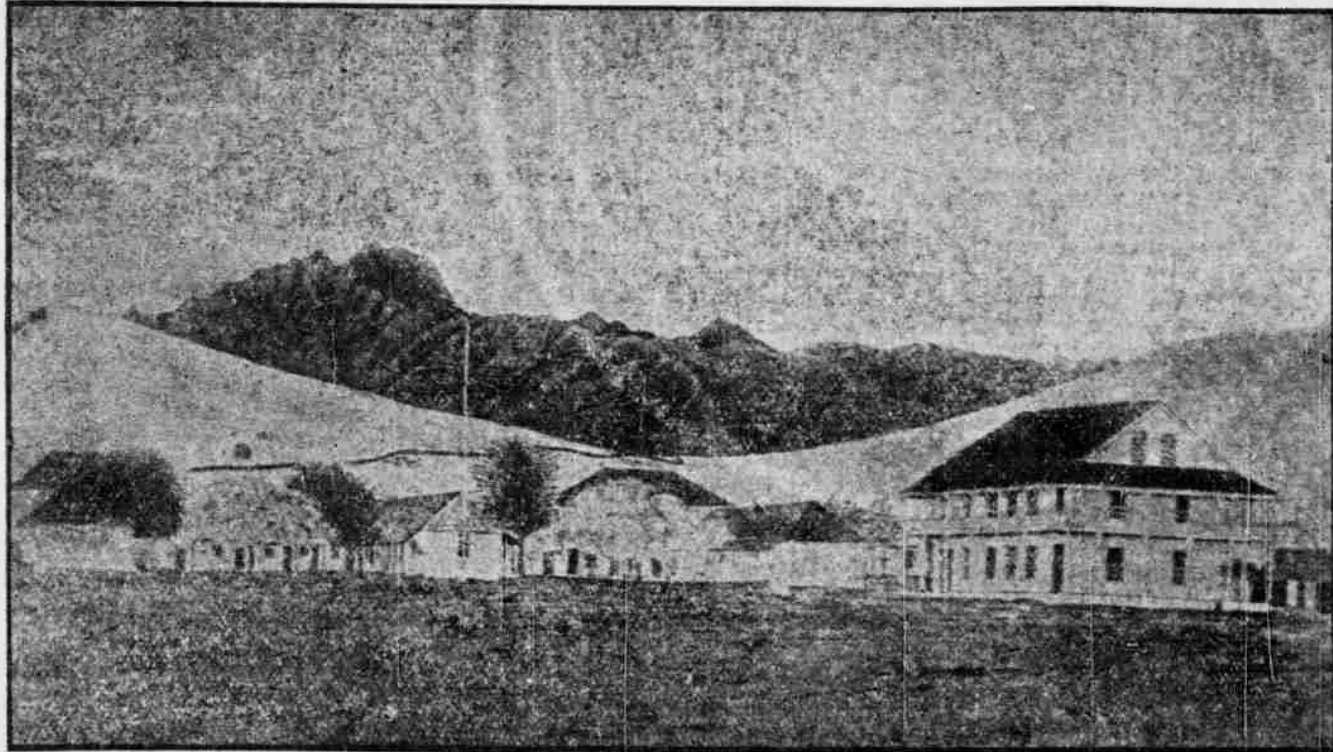
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PUNAHOU IN 1860.

Here the first Christmas celebration in Hawaii was observed in 1843.

it was not reckoned as a church holiday among the missionaries."

Some Changes.

Anyone will note that in that respect the sons of missionaries are not so exactly like their parents that one could not distinguish them apart. In these days those same sons take an active part in the affairs in their church and contribute in money or otherwise toward the fixings necessary to make the Christmas celebration and the Christmas tree better each year. Consider what the Sunday school at Central Union did last Thursday night. Think of the fiddles and horns that were played there, and ask yourself what the shade of the departed would think of it if they could have taken a peep at the magnificent scene and heard the inspiring music. It seems to the layman that the world is getting broader; that the people are reaching out farther to put joy into the hearts of those to whom it may be a stranger.

Mrs. Joseph B. Atherton, who is a sister of Frank Cooke, says her earliest recollection of Christmas in Honolulu was back in the 40s. They lived in Nuuanu avenue. It was a regular thing for the children to get in their stocking a ten-cent piece and a package of lozenges, a roll about the size of five dollars in dimes. One time she and Mrs. Alexander, then a little tot, pecked into the parlor bookcase and saw on a shelf two tiny feet. A closer investigation developed two small dolls, the first they had ever seen. And that was the sort of Christmas the children of the early missionaries to Hawaii had. There was no malihini Christmas tree, or any other, for such a thing was unknown here, it is said, until some time in the 70s.

The kamaainas remembering the hard times in their early lives marvel at the wonderful blessings of the present generation. But they should not. Taking the blessings by and large the descendants of the early missionaries, those whose paths were not always smooth and easygoing, are the ones who aid in the blessing showers to the poor of today.

Fort-Street Tree.

Miss Gulick, who may well be called one of the early missionaries—for she was born here of missionary parents—tells me her first recollection of any celebration of Christmas was about forty-nine years ago, when there was a tree for the Sabbath school in the old Fort-street church.

"My uncle, Rev. Halsey Gulick, and his wife had returned from Micronesia," she said, "and the first Christmas after they arrived here, which, I think, was forty-nine years ago, was celebrated by appropriate exercises in the church. We had a tree, though it was a small one, and there were presents on its branches for the children of the Sabbath school. Uncle Halsey and his wife were from New York, originally, and I guess they brought some of the customs of the metropolis with them. Whether they introduced them to the natives of Micronesia, I can not say, but I am inclined to believe they did not. We were of Puritan stock, and church holidays were not numerous with us. I do not believe they thought of any of them, in those days, but Thanksgiving and New Year's. The latter was always more observed by us than Christmas, and Thanksgiving more than either."

Santa Claus Hard Up.

Mrs. Lydia Bingham Coan, who was born here seventy-five years ago today is of the earliest missionary families. She, too, spent her childhood in an atmosphere of Puritanism and her whole life has been consistent with her early training. It was her father who donated the first land to be used as a site for school for training the children of the missionaries, a little school that has grown into an institution of

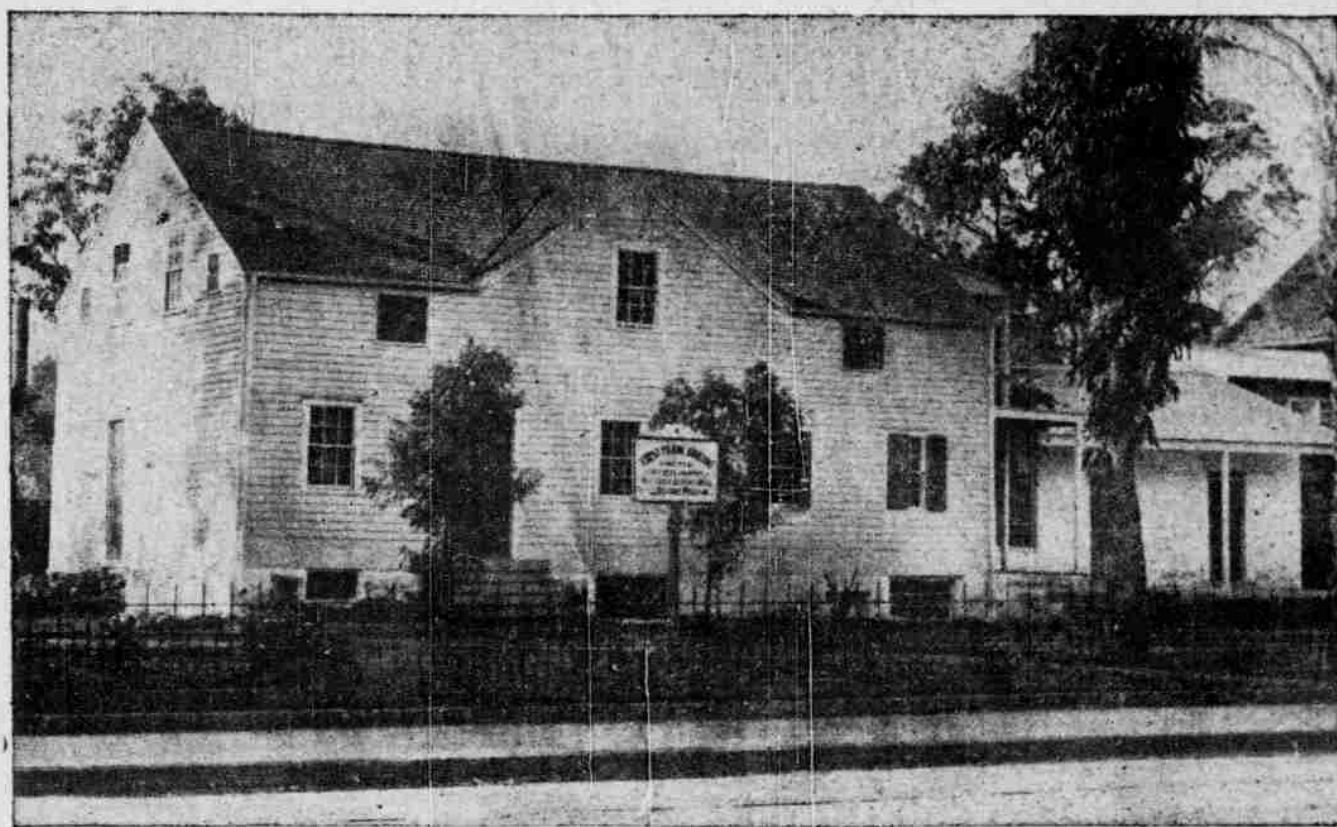
call the name of the narrator, that there were times when the flour was in such a condition, through being wet on the voyage, that it had to be dug out of the barrels with a pick. It is not to be supposed that when persons are so hard pressed for the necessities of life that they could, or would, give much thought to the celebration of holidays.

Mrs. Coan resides in the Bingham

ing survivor of the second generation of Bingham in her home the other day and could not refrain from remarking how lightly time had dealt with her. But she was sadly lacking in knowledge of the early Christmas celebrations in Honolulu.

Christmas Abroad.

"At five and one half years of age," she said to me "I went to Maine



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